

Statement by
The Hon. Rob Simmons
Member of Congress, CT/2
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NATIONAL POW/MIA RECOGNITION DAY
The Pentagon, September 15, 2006

Secretary England, General Pace, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to say a few words about true American heroes – our prisoners of war (POWs) and our missing in action (MIAs).

These patriotic Americans assumed the burden of military service for difficult assignments in dangerous places around the world – far from their homes and families.

They served the cause of freedom and Democracy when they defended our nation, our people and our values.

Although they have been lost for a time, they have not been forgotten - and they will never be forgotten. We will find them and bring them home.

It is part of our national character that we do not abandon those who have been lost in defense of America.

Since the 1840s the United States has made a determined effort to recover and give proper burial to those in uniform who have fallen in war. It was during the Civil War that the government assumed the dual obligation of identifying and burying its dead in registered graves.

Since that time the U.S. Government has continued the difficult and dangerous task of recovering our POWs and MIAs.

Why do we do this? Why do we care? We care because it's about our buddies. It's about their families. It's about coming to grips with loss, and death, and closure.

I have a particular interest in our POWs and MIAs, not just because of my own service in Vietnam, but because of some special people in my district in eastern Connecticut.

For example, Robert Dumas lives in Canterbury, CT. For more than 50 years he has been searching for his brother Roger, who was a POW in Korea. He has been to Washington more than 100 times and met with Members of Congress in an effort to discover the fate of his brother.

Bob Dumas promised his mother on her deathbed that he would never abandon the effort to find his brother – and he has kept his word. That is what we stand for here today -- keeping our word to those who served and to their families.

Another example involves U.S. Army Captain Arnold Holm, a helicopter pilot from Waterford, CT, who was shot down over Vietnam on June 11, 1972. He and two other soldiers, PFC Wayne Bibbs and SP4 Robin Yeakley, have been missing ever since.

Thirteen years ago the Joint Task Force—Full Accounting began to look for the crash site. In April 2003 my wife Heidi and I joined them in the dense jungle in the Central Highlands of Vietnam at what we hoped was the right location – but it was not.

However, a few weeks ago we received some good news: that the crash site had been found. It was along a ridge line about 200 meters from the spot we had searched three years before.

I remember receiving an e-mail from Captain Holm’s wife, Margarete, that the site had been found. Upon receiving her e-mail, my wife and I embraced with tears in our eyes because we knew that the long wait for the Holm Family was finally coming to a close.

A few days later I received a letter from a helicopter pilot who had flown with Captain Holm. He wrote:

“...the fact that we were never able to find Dusty [Arnie] and his crew gnawed at my guts until last night. Thank you for closing another sad chapter in the history of this war.” [W. Frank Walker, Centaur 16]

Margarete Holm, Frank Walker and family members are with us here today. Thank you for keeping the faith.

Once the crash site was located, I asked the Vietnamese government for special assistance to excavate the site next year without removing any other excavation from the list.

Just this week I received a letter from Pham Van Que of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stating:

“During the 86th Joint Field Activity...the Vietnam-US Joint Investigation Team has found the crash site of a helicopter...which may be related to Captain Holm and his crew members. The Joint Investigation Team has suggested the excavation of this site at the earliest possible [time].”

In an effort to promote these humanitarian efforts this week, the House of Representatives passed unanimously House Concurrent Resolution 444, which extended

“The appreciation of Congress and the Nation to the Department of Defense organizations, military departments, and personnel engaged in the mission to achieve the fullest possible accounting for all Americans unaccounted for as a result of the Nation’s wars, to the POW/MIA families and veterans who support the mission and to foreign nations that assist in the mission.”

Ladies and Gentlemen, as a veteran and a member of the Armed Services Committee, I pledge to you that we will support these efforts around the world. We will never give up the work, the hope or the commitment.

I thank you for being here today to honor our POWs and MIAs, and their families. We will not rest until they have all been accounted for, and are returned to the nation and the families for whom they sacrificed.

May God bless them and God bless the United States of America.
